
American Farmers in Russia

by Harold Ware

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Try to rush him and some peasant will mildly remind you that "Work is not a bear," meaning that you don't have to chase it; it will be there always so take your time; *but* keep at it. That philosophy was perhaps the hardest lesson the honest-to-god American "dirt farmers" who went with the Friends of Soviet Russia tractor unit had to learn. The boys wanted to make a record. They had the psychology bred by our system of exploitation whereby the farmer must hurry 14 hours a day, pay interest on machinery and mortgages until the farm is taken away and he has the choice of becoming a tenant or a city truck driver.

From the Baltic seaport of Libau to Perm and later on as far east as Tomsk in Siberia we learned many other lessons and had to take a lot of press out of our home-grown impressions of Russia and the Russian peasant. He is not superstitiously opposed to modern machinery. The Tsarist regime and subsequent wars and blockade have prevented him from its use; that alone has kept agriculture in its present primitive state. For he is a true craftsman. And of all the types, city mechanic, student, and what not, the young Russian peasant learned best how to operate the tractors; for he already knew the land and appreciated the tremendous step from his home-made plow. It was the appreciation of the peasants who came from distant villages to see us work and the realization that they "got" the contrasts of a large modern tractor pulling two grain drills, throwing the seed at the rate of 50 acres a day while across the road women with sickles were harvesting, just as their mothers did a hundred years ago, that encouraged us.

Although the grain we were producing was for the Kisel miners, our outside work in villages and the educational effect of our main work was all for the peasants. This correlation of work is the new purpose of workers' reconstruction. Russian industrial workers need food. It will be years before the lost horsepower of Russia will be re-

stored. These two facts point to the most effective way in which American workers can help.

Why not have miners' unions in America organize tractor batteries, and clothing workers and others groups, other batteries? Sent them over just as the FSR unit was sent to support the workers with food and to teach and help the peasants to a new agriculture. A great tract of land has already been assigned for this purpose in the rich, level black soil district east of Cheliabinsk.

The Russian government and the International Workers' RELief are going to start the ball rolling with two batteries of 25 tractors each. With each of the batteries will be 20 Americans, including farmers, mechanics, company experts, etc. The correlation of work and solidarity extends to America for the personnel of the batteries is recruited from progressive farm organizations of the Northwest. The Trans-Siberian railroad is only 15 miles from the land and a spur track from the main Siberian line will connect it. Fuel can then be delivered direct from the River station at Samara to the job in tank cars. Along the main line at the station are warehouses and, best of all, a giant grain elevator.

There has been appropriated \$350,000 to start the first batteries and to build the foundation for the biggest grain farm in the world. But that is only a start. American farmers and workers should organize units of machinery for every industry and raise its banner over one of the battery camps which will operate as a separate productive unit of the whole. Each battery camp will resemble the portable gangs common in our Western grain fields and will be managed by men who were brought up in that country. They will start out in the spring with their tents and kitchen on wheels; planting and harvesting, returning to the central farm base in the fall to overhaul the tractors and machinery and hole up for the severe Russian winter.

It was in proving that this type of farming could be done and that it would serve as a true link between proletarian and peasant that the FSR tractor unit accomplished most. But in proving this under difficulties it planted 4,000 acres of grain and thereby wrote a concrete message of solidarity; not only between workers but also between American and Russian farmers for the boys have got much to tell their neighbors when they get home.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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